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THE MELIK'S OF EASTERN ARMENIA IV: THE SIWNID ORIGIN OF XAČ'ATUR ABOVEAN

Xač'atur Abovean (c. 1809-1848?)¹ has been properly regarded as one of the foremost figures not just of Armenian literature but of Armenian history at large. Author, teacher and educationist, he not only wrote the first Armenian novel and introduced the principles of modern European education to the Armenians under Russian rule, but by opting to write in the vernacular and selecting the dialect of Erevan as his vehicle he ended the tyranny of classical Armenian over Armenian literature and education and laid the basis for their development in the modern world. It is with no exaggeration that he may be placed after St. Gregory and St. Mesrop Maštoc' as the 'third illuminator' of the Armenian nation, a title often reserved for valid enough reasons for Mxit'ar Sebastac'i.

What is not generally known about Xač'atur Abovean, however, is that the service which he rendered to his people were not the result of mere happenstance. Abovean was not only by temperament and education well suited to the role which he chose for himself but both by social origin and descent he must have been deeply imbued with a sense of responsibility to his people. It has always been known that Abovean was of a 'good' and even 'noble' family². The fact is,

¹ The exact date of Abovean's birth is not certain. It has been placed as early as 1804, the year after his parents' marriage, and as late as 1812. Friedrich Parrot, however, for whom Abovean served as interpreter and who accompanied him on his ascent of Ararat in 1829, refers to him as a youth of twenty which would make the year of his birth 1809 (October, 15). This is the date accepted by the *Haykakan Sovetakan Hanragitaran* Vol. I; the *Bolshaja Sovetskaja Encik* has 1805. The date of Abovean's death is even less certain for he left his home on April 2/14 1848 and was never heard from again. Various explanations have been given for his disappearance at this time: that he was melancholic and committed suicide, that he was killed by his Persian enemies, or that he was arrested by the Secret Police of Nicholas I and either murdered or sent into Siberian exile to die. Given his love for children and the fact that at that time he had a son of eight and a daughter of five, it is difficult to believe that Abovean committed suicide even given his unhappy marriage and the many disappointments in his crusade for a more modern system of education.

For the dates of Abovean cf also P. H. HAKOBYAN, *Xač'atur Abovean (kyank'ə, gorcə žamanakə, 1809-1836)* (Erevan, 1967) 48-71, and V. J. GHAZARIAN, "The birthdate of Khachatour Abovian" *PBH* 1979 No. 2 (Erevan) 231-240, the second of which was not yet available to me as this article went to press.

² For all this cf the *Haykakan Sovetakan Hanragitaran*, *ibid.*, which stresses the

however, that he was of princely and even royal descent; a scion of the Melik's of Ľarabal and of the ancient and illustrious House of the Princes and Kings of Siwnik'.

At the time Xač'atur Abovean was born in the early nineteenth century, his family was one of the most prominent in the Khanate of Erevan. Indeed, until the coming of the Russians in 1828, it held the position of *tanutēr* (hereditary chieftain) of K'anak'er, a large village to the north of Erevan³. Although all documents, grants and family papers were lost when the Persians wasted K'anak'er in 1825, Xač'atur Abovean, who was a nephew of the last *tanutēr*, wrote a description of his family's origin which the German scholar von Haxthausen records in the following words:

"It is said that an ancestor of Abovian, who lived six generations ago, came from a northern country, with his family and followers, driven by their enemy, to the Khan of Erivan, and requested permission to settle upon the spot where Kanakir now stands. Their leader, named Abov, was of an ancient and noble family.... In Tiflis, Garabey (*sic*, i.e. Ľarabal), and Lory, there likewise still exist families of this name and extraction. Their origin has conferred on this family the hereditary village magistracy of Kanakir; they are not however lords of the soil, nor have any feudal rights, but merely the control over the police"⁴.

Sparse in detail though this account may be, we can use it to make some interesting calculations: Counting either Xač'atur Abovean as the sixth generation from from Abov (with Abov's son as the first) or eliminating Xač'atur and counting his father as the sixth generation (with Abov, himself, as the first), and allowing the usual thirty years to a generation, we find that the Abov in question can only have been Abov I the Black, founder of the House of Beglarean, Melik's of Giwlistan, who died in 1632⁵ ($6 \times 30 = 180$; $1632 + 180 = 1812$; Xač'atur Abovean was born in c. 1809). This Abov I, we know, was succeeded as melik' by his son Beglar I⁶, who we also know had more

poverty of the family although this was true only after the death of Abov II and the ravages of the Persian invasion of 1795.

³ The rapid growth of Erevan in recent decades has engulfed K'anak'er, which is now part of the city. Once beautifully located among trees and shrubbery, it was a resort for Erevan Armenians in the summer months.

⁴ August VON HAXTHAUSEN, *Transcaucasia. Sketches of the Nations and Races between the Black Sea and the Caspian* (London, 1854), 206.

⁵ RAFFI, *Xamsayi melik'ut'iwnnerə* (Vienna, 1906), 8; Apres BĚKNAZAREANC', *Galtmik' Ľarabali* (St. Petersburg, 1886), 192.

⁶ RAFFI, *ibid.*; BĚKNAZAREANC', *ibid.*

than one brother⁷. It must have been from one of these brothers that there issued the Abovean line of K'anak'er.

In addition to Abovean's account as transmitted by Haxthausen, the Xač'atur Abovean House-Museum in K'anak'er, Erevan, has gathered further information on the origins of his family which both confirms and amplifies the earlier information at our disposal. In 1895, for example, Abovean's son Vardan wrote the following summary of the Abovean origin. Based as it is on oral tradition, however, it has, as we shall see, been somewhat garbled:

"The ancestor of the Aboveans was Abov, who was the grandfather of Xač'atur Abovean's father. Abov emigrated from Lazistan with a group of other emigrants. The reason for this emigration was the continual attacks and quarrels among the Lazistan mountaineers which forced the Armenian peasants, a peaceful people, to leave that country. This emigration came and settled in K'anak'er"⁸.

Mr. Levon Eric'yan, Director of the museum, is of the opinion that the Abov in question must have been the same as the Abov of the Abovean (i.e. Beglarian) Melik's of Giwlistan, who led a group of Armenian families from the *Lesgian* country in the Caucasus Mountains to the Khanate of Erevan, and that these were the emigrants who were settled at K'anak'er⁹. As is immediately clear, however, the genealogy of his family has been telescoped by Vardan for he calls Abov "the grandfather of Xač'atur Abovean's father (*Abov... or Xač'aturi hor papn ē elel*), and makes *him* the Abov who founded the line of K'anak'er. As we shall see, this Abov, actually the third of that name, was Xač'atur Abovean's own grandfather (d. 1794); it was this Abov (II of K'anak'er)'s grandfather, Abov (I of K'anak'er), who first settled in K'anak'er, and it was *his* grandfather, Abov I the Black, Melik' of Giwlistan, who fled from the Lesgians (not the Laz) to Łarabał (not Erevan).

Of the two family traditions the one recorded by Haxthausen from Xač'atur Abovean's own writings is the more accurate for it correctly dates the flight from the "northern country", to a period six generations before, when we know from other sources that Abov the Black fled from Nij to Łarabał¹⁰. In Vardan's account, the six generations have

⁷ RAFFI, *ibid.*

⁸ Quoted by Levon Eric'yan in a letter to the author dated 21.12.1976, hereinafter: ERIC'YAN, *Letter*.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ BĖKNAXAREANC', *ibid.*

been reduced to four and the Lesgian enemies of Abov the Black changed to the Laz of Lazistan.

But Xač'atur Abovean, in his account as recorded by Haxthausen, has telescoped events as well. While he recognizes that six generations separated the first Abov from himself, Abovean confused Abov's settlement in Łarabał with the settlement of a later Abov, Xač'atur's great-great grandfather, in K'anak'er. The true descent of Xač'atur Abovean's family after its departure from the Lesgian country must have been as follows:

1. ABOV I THE BLACK (Sew-Abov). The first Abov came, as we have seen, from Niĵ, near Nuxa, a town in the Udin country near the southern foothills of the Caucasus Mountains, north of the River Kur¹¹. The family tradition preserved by the Aboveans supplies us with the reason for this emigration, namely the attacks of the Lesgians, which, as a matter of fact, were a continual torment in this region until the coming of the Russians¹². We know that Abov's father, Dawit' had been forced to accompany Shah Abbas to Iran in 1586 and it is likely that Abov went with him. Upon his return to Nuxa, he must have found that his ancestral lands had been seized by the Lesgians and that he was unable to regain them. Invited by his Hasan-Ĵalalean relatives, the senior family of Melik's of Łarabał, to come and settle in Giwlistan¹³, Abov did so and was probably confirmed by the Shah as melik of the district some time thereafter. Indeed, this compensation of domains in Łarabał for lands lost by the Abovids north of the Kur may very well have been a solution imposed upon the Hasan-Ĵalalids by the Shah whatever their feelings about ceding some of their own lands to their Abovid cousins.

2. N.N. (Abov I's son). Abov I had more than one son, the eldest, Beglar I, succeeding him as Melik' of Giwlistan. Since Abov died in 1632 and we have seen that it was another Abov who settled in K'anak'er, there must have been another generation between the two. This insertion of a generation here is necessary for three reasons: 1) Haxthausen, quoting Abovean, says that six generations separated the family from Abov and since the Abov who settled in K'anak'er was Abovean's great-great grandfather, two generations are required

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² For the Lesgians and the Melik's cf Joseph EMIN, *The Life and Adventures of Emin Joseph Emin 1726-1809* ed. by Amy APCAR (Calcutta, 1918), V. II, chap. XVIII.

¹³ BĚKNAZAREANC, *ibid.*

to take us back to Abov I counting Abov, himself as one of them 2) Armenians traditionally do not name a son after his father but usually name one after his grandfather so that the Abov who settled in K'anak'er was probably a grandson rather than a son of Abov I finally, 3) if the Abov who settled in K'anak'er was the great-great grandfather of Xač'atur Abovean, then he must have flourished c. 1680 (four generations \times 30 years per generation = 120 years; c. 1800 – 120 = c. 1680). Since Abov I died in 1632, we may presume an otherwise unknown prince, son of Abov I and one of the brothers of Beglar ' known to have existed, who was the father of the Abov who settled in K'anak'er. This prince would have flourished in c. 1660.

3. ABOV (I of K'anak'er). Not to be confused with Abov II "The Lame", son of Beglar I and Melik' of Giwlistan (d. 1728), who must have been his first cousin, this would be that Abov who settled in K'anak'er. The circumstances of his coming to the Erevan Khanate are unknown to us, these having been confused, as we have seen, with the account of Abov I's emigration to Łarabał.

4. VIRAP. Of this prince, who was the son of Abov I of K'anak'er, only the name has been preserved¹⁴. He was the great grandfather of Xač'atur Abovean and must have flourished c. 1710.

5. ABOV (II of K'anak'er) (d. 1794). With this prince, Abovean's grandfather, we enter the full light of history for he was a distinguished figure and a certain amount of detail has come down to us concerning him. Abov Abovean was one of the most renowned personages of the Khanate of Erevan in the second half of the eighteenth century, a man of virtue and humanitarianism famed for his many charities and benefactions to all regardless of race or creed. Held in as high regard by the local Turks as he was by the Armenians, he also enjoyed the good will of the Persian Khan. The Catholicos of the Armenian Church, Łukas Karnec'i (1780-1799), was a personal friend of *Parun* Abov and often visited him in his home, a large rambling farm in K'anak'er whose various buildings and their arrangement reminded Haxthausen of a Roman villa. Abov for his part stayed at the Catholical palace (*veharan*) on his visits to Ējmiacin. Abov is cited as one of the Armenians who participated in the election of Catholicos Łukas and when the *tanutēr* died, Łukas came to his home to take part in the ceremonies which followed the appointed period of mourning¹⁵.

¹⁴ ERIC'YAN, *Letter*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

According to Haxthausen¹⁶, Abov possessed several manufacturing establishments in Erevan and also shops there which he rented out. He was also the proprietor of a considerable amount of land including five orchards one of which, on the Tiflis-Erevan road, was so extensive that it took nearly an hour to ride around it on horseback. This particular property contained hundreds of walnut, apple, pear, and peach trees, as well as mulberry bushes and trees of the kind called *p'sat* (*elaeagnus orientalis*). Somewhat like a willow, this produces a date-like fruit raised as a crop.

6. YARUT'IWN. The tanutēr Abov II was married to a lady named Sarah (Sara-*xatun*)¹⁷ and had two sons and four daughters. Yarut'iwn, the eldest son, who was born in 1776, succeeded his father as tanutēr upon his death in 1794 and was presumably the last to bear the title. He too was married and left a numerous progeny but I have been unable to learn anything about them except that some still live in K'anak'er while others are in Erevan and elsewhere in the Soviet Union¹⁸. After the death of Abov II, the Aboveans became impoverished as a result of the wars and insecurity of the times. The family suffered especially as a result of the Persian invasions under Agha Muhammad Khan (1795), and a document has been discovered dated 1797 by which Yarut'iwn Abovean borrowed a sum of ten t'umans from the catholicate of Ējmiacin for one year for the, at that time, relatively low interest rate of 20%¹⁹.

Yarut'iwn Abovean's only brother Awetik', born in 1778, was the father of Xaç'atur Abovean. We do not know the names of his four sisters two of whom married and remained in K'anak'er while the other two married in Erevan²⁰. Haxthausen²¹ states that Xaç'atur Abovean was related to the House of Ałamalean, Melik's of Erevan, and Eric'yan suggests²² that one of Abovean's aunts may have been T'aguhi, the wife of Sahak Ałamalean (d. 1834), the last melik', or at least the wife of some member of his family. In support of this Eric'yan notes that whenever Xaç'atur Abovean's mother went to

¹⁶ HAXTHAUSEN, *ibid.*

¹⁷ ERIC'YAN, *ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ I am indebted to M. Jean-Pierre Mahé for this information for which he directed me to HAKOBYAN, 42-44.

²⁰ ERIC'YAN, *ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

Ējmiacin, as she often did, she would stop at Melik' Sahak's house and that Abovean, himself, stated that when in Erevan he often stayed a few days in the home of his paternal aunt. Years later T'adewos Ałamalean, son of Melik' Sahak, was Abovean's pupil at Ējmiacin and, when Abovean spent a few months in St. Petersburg in 1834-35 he often visited the Melik's daughter, Maria, who had been his childhood companion and who was married to Alexander, Prince Royal of Georgia²³.

In 1803, Awetik' Abovean married T'aguhi, daughter of a certain Yovhannēs T'adewoseanc' of K'anak'er. Four sons were born to this marriage: Xač'atur, Virap, Karapet and a fourth who died as a child. Virap and Karapet also died early and neither left any children. T'aguhi Abovean died while Xač'atur was studying at the University of Dorpat (1830-1836)²⁴.

As for Xač'atur Abovean, himself, he married a German woman in Tiflis in 1839, a certain Emilia Looze who died in 1870. Of this marriage were born two children, a son Vardan (1840-1896) and a daughter Zarmanduxt (1843-1909), who was also given the Western name Adelaide²⁵. Vardan Abovean married Catherine Yaralean and had eight children one of whom, Victoria (b. 1883), married (1907) the actor Aršavir Šaxatuni, who later married Nina Saakovna Melik-Agamalova (d. 1950), apparently the daughter of a grandson of Melik' Sahak²⁶. If Xač'atur Abovean's aunt was actually the wife of Melik' Sahak, Nina would have been Victoria Abovean's third cousin. Vardan's sister Zarmanduxt/Adelaide married a Russian, Gregory Yakovlevich Bozhovsky, and had four daughters and a son²⁷. Altogether the descendants of Xač'atur Abovean numbered some sixty individuals in 1976 living in such widely separated places as Erevan, Ējmiacin, Leningrad, Vilna, Makhachkala, Stavropol and Simferopol, many of whom have distinguished themselves in various walks of Soviet life²⁸.

²³ *Ibid.* Cf. also R. H. HEWSEN, "The Melik's of Eastern Armenia. A Preliminary Study" *REArm* IX (1972), 285-329; Idem. "The Melik's of Eastern Armenia III" *REArm* XI (1975-1976), 219-243.

²⁴ ERIC'YAN, *Letter*.

²⁵ L. ERIC'YAN, *Mec Lusaworč'i Žaranger* (Erevan, 1971), 28-29.

²⁶ J. KAYALOFF, *The Battle of Sardarapat* (Hague, 1973), 49, n. 1.

²⁷ ERIC'YAN, *Mec Lusaworč'i*, 29.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

The identification of Xaç'atur Abovean's ancestor Abov with Abov I, Melik' of Giwlistan, is by no means the last word on the subject of his family's origin for, as I have already demonstrated in another study²⁹, Abov, himself, was a descendant of the ancient princely (later royal) House of Siwnik': This descent may be summarized here by simply following the various branches of the male line through the centuries³⁰.

While the House of Siwnik' is of immemorial origin³¹ and may well be descended from Scythian chieftains who settled the region of Siwnik' after the fall of Urartu in the early sixth century B.C., the earliest known member of the family was Antiochus I (Andōvk), who was Prince of Siwnik' at the time of the conversion of Armenia to Christianity in 314. It was Antiochus' grand-daughter, P'aranjem, who, as wife of Aršak II, became Queen of Armenia, and it was his great-grandson (P'aranjem's nephew, son of her brother Babik) who was the notorious traitor Vasak I at the time of the Vardananc' War (451). The descent of the Siwnids, however, passes through P'aranjem's other brother Valinak II (404/5-412/3) and continues (with only a few lacunae in our records) down to the ninth century, when the House of Siwnik', once sovereigns over the largest principality in Armenia—a veritable state within a state—began to break up into several lines each with its own territory carved from the family patrimony.

The last prince of the whole of Siwnik', Vasak III, died in 821. The senior line of the house, the Princes of Vayoc' Jor, were descended from his son P'ilippos (821-848) and it was this line which secured for itself the royal title when P'ilippos' great-grandson Smbat II (c. 970-c. 998) was recognized King of Siwnik' by the Caliph³². The senior line of the House of Siwnik' came to an end soon after this with Smbat's son Vasak VI (c. 998-c. 1019), whose only child, a daughter, Catherine (Katramidē), married King Gagik I of Armenia (989-1020). Thereafter the throne passed to Vasak's distant cousin Smbat III, whose father, Ašot, Prince of Gełark'unik', was a great-

²⁹ HEWSEN, «Melik's, Prelim.».

³⁰ Cf *ibid.*, chart, also the charts in HEWSEN "Melik's II" *REA* X (1973-1974), and more recently and more fully C. TOUMANOFF, *Manuel de généalogie et de chronologie pour la Caucasic chrétienne* (Rome, 1976), 226-261.

³¹ C. TOUMANOFF, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (Washington, D.C., 1963), 214 and n. 244.

³² C. TOUMANOFF, "Armenia and Georgia" in *Cambridge Medieval History*, IV *The Byzantine Empire, Part I Byzantium and its Neighbors* (Cambridge, 1966) 616, 620.

great-grandson of P'ilippos' brother Sahak, younger son of Vasak III and whose mother was a daughter of King Smbat II.

Smbat III was succeeded by his brother Grigor III (d. c. 1072). Since both brothers died childless, however, Grigor left the throne to Senek'erim, Prince of the Other (i.e. Eastern) Haband and titular King of Albania, who was the brother of Grigor's wife Šahanduxt (d. 1119) and who now added the dignity of "King of Siwnik'" to his other titles. Senek'erim's family was quite distinct from the House of Siwnik' being descended from the Aranšahikid dynasty, the earliest, pre-Arsacid, royal house of Caucasian Albania.

The Aranšahikids did not keep the title "King of Siwnik'" for long. Senek'erim's son, Grigor IV (1094-1116) also left but a single daughter Catherine (Kata), who married Hasan, Prince of Xač'ēn (1142-p. 1201) of the third and youngest line of the Siwnid House. After his marriage Hasan, too, took the title "King" of Siwnik' (1160-1170) until the title was suppressed, probably by the Muslims. The extinction of various lines at this time — the period of the Turkish invasions — carried with it a loss of territory, too, and the total lands inherited by the House of Xač'ēn, including Xač'ēn, itself, was only a fragment of the old Siwnid holdings. Hasan I was a true Siwnid, however, being a ninth generation descendant of Sahak II, younger son of Vasak III.

After Hasan I's death the remaining Siwnid territory, small as it was, was divided among his three sons. The senior line, descended from his son, Vaxtang-Tōnkik, eventually became the Hasan-Ĵalalid Melik's of Xač'ēn. The second line, descended from Vaxtank's brother Grigor the Black, eventually gave rise to both the Ulubekid Meliks of Gelam and the Aytinid Yuzbashis of Nuxa. The third line, descended from Vaxtank's second brother, produced the Avaniid Melik's of Dizak.

In the late fourteenth century, all of the surviving lines of the House of Siwnik' were dispossessed by the Mongols under Timur (1370-1405)³³ but some decades later, Aytin, an eighth generation descendant of Grigor the Black, managed to secure the favor of the Black Sheep Turkoman chieftain, Jehan Shah (1435-1467), and so regained at least some of the family's ancestral lands and the recognition of their sovereign status under the title *melik*³⁴. Aytin, otherwise a mere

³³ BĒKNAZAREANC', 189-90.

³⁴ HAKOBYAN, 387 ff.

scion of a Siwnid branch, also secured for himself the hereditary title ‘*yuzbashi*’ and with it certain lands north of the Kur in the vicinity of Nuxa³⁵. It was Aytin’s great-great-grandson Abov I (d. 1632), who, fleeing Nuxa, settled in Łarabał where he founded the House of Beglarean, Melik’s of Giwlistan, and it was Abov’s grandson, another Abov, who settled in the Erevan Khanate to found the line of hereditary Tanutērs of K’anak’er, who were to give to the world Xač’atur Abovean, one of the most influential figures in Armenian history.

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³⁵ *Ibid.*; BĒKNAZAREANC’, *ibid.*

THE DESCENT OF XAČ'ATUR ABOVEAN FROM THE PRINCES OF SIWNIK'

ANTIOCHUS/ANDOVK I ————— 23 generations ————— Atrnerseh I ————— c. 8 generations —————
 earliest recorded d. p. 855
 Pr. of Siwnik' earliest recorded
 A.D. 314 Pr. of Xač'en

Grigor the Black ————— 7 generations ————— Aytin 1458-1467 ————— Hasan the Black —————
 1205 Yuzbashi of Nuxa Yuzbashi of Nuxa
 m. Šušan-Dop' for Jehan-Shah
 d. of Sarkis II of the Black
 Pr. Mxargrjeli Sheep Turkomans
 first Pr. of (Qara-Qoyunlu)

Vardan ————— David ————— Abov I the Black ————— Beglar I —————
 Y. of N. Y. of N. migrated from (1632-?)
 Nuxa to Łarabal
 first Melik' of
 Giwlistan d. 1632
 Prince
 [1660]

